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ABSTRACT

California is ranked 50 out of 50 states for providing school library services, with a ratio of student to public school media specialist of 6,361 to 1. The second worst state is Rhode Island, which has a ratio of 1,941 to 1. California's school libraries are declining at a time when technological developments and research in academic achievement have underscored their critical importance. Library Media Center (LMC) 2000 was a project of the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), intended to establish school libraries as a critical factor in academic success and the hub of learning at a school. LMC 2000 Project strategies included providing professional development to participating SFUSD school librarians, improving the link between school libraries and San Francisco public libraries, and increasing and enhancing the use of technology in school libraries. The Project placed strong emphasis on information technology's increasing role in libraries and the critical services it provides to children who are learning read, write, and conduct research. Over the last three years, San Francisco library media teachers involved in the program have engaged in a process of professional development opportunities, networking, and communication. In a district that has experienced massive cutbacks in library media services, library media teachers have encouraged and supported each other while learning to use new technologies and sharing areas of expertise and resources. This paper describes the three years of program activities and discusses plans for future activities. (SWC)

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"NOT EXTINCT!" SCHOOL LIBRARIES FOR LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Library Media Center 2000 focuses on school library services, technology, training and advocacy—restructuring information and meeting learning needs: linguistic, cultural, multimedia. Over the last three years, San Francisco library media teachers have engaged in a process of professional development opportunities, networking and communication. In a district that has experienced massive cutbacks in library media services, library media teachers have encouraged and supported each other while learning to use new technologies, and sharing areas of expertise and resources.

BACKGROUND

School and public libraries and librarians when adequately equipped, can be a powerful catalyst in a young persons life, offering an amalgam of attentiveness, encouragement, ideas, hope and knowledge that can help to redirect a life—as many have done in the past. Libraries cannot solve all of the problems that kids have, but they can and do make a tremendous difference. (Mathews, 1996, p. 4)

Barbara Jeffus, school library consultant for the California Department of Education notes that public libraries have been used to take up the slack but, "Public libraries are on a different mission. A school library's job is to support curriculum. A public library can't afford to do what we should be doing in the schools. It's a dilemma; parents complain that public libraries don't have books to do school assignments when schools should have the books." (*California Educator*, 1996, p. 15)

California is ranked 50 out of 50 states for providing school library services. California's ratio of student to public school media specialist is 6,361 to 1. The second worst state is Rhode Island which has a ratio of 1,941 to 1. The public school library has become the endangered species of the California education system. (*California Educator*, 1996, p. 15)

California's school libraries are declining at a time when technological developments and research in academic achievement have underscored their critical importance. Substandard school libraries are detrimental to all students, especially those who are poor, from minority groups or limited in English proficiency.

Stephen D. Krashen (1996) found that many children in California's' schools today have practically no access to books and no quiet comfortable place to read. He further discovered that: "affluent children do well in school at least partly because of the print rich environment they experience outside of school. School should not simply be a test that privileged children pass. The school library can be an equalizer." (pp. 3-4)

San Francisco's school libraries are ill-equipped to meet the challenge of becoming library media centers for three major reasons: (1) lack of staffing, (2) limited and outdated collections, and (3) lack of technology. San Francisco elementary schools have not had librarians for over a decade. Middle schools have been assigned a half-time librarian only. In an 1995 newspaper profile, San Franscisco Unified School District (SFUSD) Superintendent Rojas remarked that librarians were "extinct"!

The absence of professional staff has had an extremely severe impact on collections. Library media teachers possess specialized skills in collection development to meet grade level needs and implement the school's curriculum. Without staffing, no one advocates for purchasing library resources. No one knows which resources are most needed. No one identifies and weeds out outdated or damaged books. Collections become less useful and then gradually much less used.

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"Strong, knowledgeable librarians have an impact on the whole school," executive director Kathy Owyang Turner says in explaining the San Francisco Education (Ed) Fund strategy for the Library Media Center 2000 Project. "Well-equipped libraries are one of the most effective and efficient ways to reach students and teachers. Library Media Center 2000 is designed to help our schools leap into the information age."

THE LIBRARY MEDIA CENTER 2000 PROJECT

Since 1979, the San Francisco Education Fund has been dedicated to improving the quality of public education in San Francisco, seeking to improve academic performance in schools by providing leadership and financing for innovation in the classroom. Ed Fund programs encourage teachers and students to take an active part in developing classrooms and schools to be supportive, productive and effective places for children to learn. The Ed Fund brings community resources to schools by building partnerships between educators and the community. During the past 16 years, the Ed Fund has channeled over US$11,000,000 into San Francisco public schools with the support of contributions from corporations, foundations and individuals.

The Library Media Center 2000 Project (LMC 2000) was built on the earlier School Library Project. This three-year effort, concluded in 1989-1990, strengthened whole language and early literacy programs in over 30 elementary schools in the district by purchasing books and organizing author visits to schools.

The primary objective of the LMC 2000 Project was to establish SFUSD school libraries as a critical factor in academic success and the hub of learning at a school. One of the most significant obstacles to widespread development of innovative curriculum is the lack of resources available to the classroom teacher. Other schools across the state and nation have solved this problem by transforming the library and librarian into a partner in curriculum development and classroom teaching. Successful programs take the traditional library and introduce technology (CD-ROMs, online research capabilities, video, etc.) to create a new library media center model.

The LMC 2000 Project strategies included providing professional development to participating SFUSD school librarians, improving the link between school libraries and San Francisco public libraries, and increasing and enhancing the use of technology in school libraries. The Project placed strong emphasis on information technology's increasing role in libraries and the critical services it provides to children who are learning to read, write, and conduct research. Students need to know how to use both print and nonprint resources for research and that is what school librarians teach!

Year One 1994-95

The Library Media Center 2000 Project began in spring 1994 with a planning grant from DeWitt Wallace/Reader's Digest Fund. A core committee of district and Ed Fund staff spent several months researching school libraries with the help of state and national library leaders. As a part of the planning process, site visits were made in California and to outstanding projects in Kansas and Louisiana.

The LMC 2000 Project was established jointly by the Ed Fund and San Francisco Unified School District in a collaborative effort to counter the loss of school libraries and librarians due to budget cuts. It was built on a three year professional development program to transform the District's school libraries. LMC 2000's five major strands of professional development include:

1. Collaborative teaching and planning. Librarians and teachers jointly develop and teach curriculum that implements California's state frameworks for content and teaching. "Perhaps the most important outcome of LMC 2000 is that I believe teachers and students understand that the library is an integral part of the school," says Adelaide Creet, Francisco Middle School. A sixth grade class there recently completed a project on ancient Egypt. The students did excavating work, wrote hieroglyphics, prepared mummies, made drawings, cooked an Egyptian lunch and listened to Verdi's *Aida* as well as viewing parts of *Aida* on a video. Other teachers in the school took their students on a tour to view the work of the sixth grade class.

A program was made out in Egyptian writing. The library was mentioned as a major contributor to this class project.

2. Collection management. From electronic card catalogs to weeding the collection, this area of professional development focused on the library media teacher and emphasized good practices in library management. Judith Hansen, Aptos Middle School says, "The money was immediately spent on books, new books, unlike most of our collection. I was able to check out new books to students, which makes them happy. It makes me happy too...I have dramatically changed the Aptos Library having weeded out about 4000 obsolete books over the past two months. We gained space, a more usable collection and much respect from our users."

3. Information skills. By the end of three years, each school library will develop its curriculum for teaching students how to research and analyze information across print and electronic media.

4. Technology. Prior to the implementation of the LMC 2000 Project, many classroom teachers and some librarians were still working without computers. "The library is one of the best possible places in a school to use technology," says Joanne Leong. "Many librarians went to school before computers were in use. This project helps us catch up! LMC 2000 reinforces the concept of the library media center as the main hub of the school where equal access for all students should be met..."

5. Networking to outside resources. Past collaborative programs sponsored by the Ed Fund have taught the importance of linking school personnel to their counterparts in the broader community. Joanne Leong comments on this essential aspect of LMC 2000: "Support from fellow librarians that provided encouragement, inspiration, practical ideas, a place to discuss the future of the library program at SFUSD, a listening ear, the commitment by Ed Fund personnel has helped unify all of us."

The District contributed over US$400,000 to the LMC 2000 project during the first two years, funding full-time salaries for participating librarians (many of whom were previously employed only half time). With generous gifts from the Mary A. Crocker Trust, the Gap Foundation, the William Gilmore Fund, IBM, and Dewitt Wallace/Reader's Digest Fund, the Ed Fund has provided for monthly training for librarians, a four-day summer institute, and grants to purchase books and materials.

Twenty-eight schools applied in a competitive process. A core of 12 schools was selected for the project. Teams of four, composed of principals, library media teachers, computer teachers and classroom teachers, attended a summer institute in June 1994. In September, librarians traveled to Clovis, California to visit the site of one of the most outstanding library programs in the state.

Year Two 1995-96

During the 1995-96 school year, the LMC 2000 Project grew to 16 schools, aided in part by funds committed by AmeriCorps and IBM. AmeriCorps awarded US $120,000 to the San Francisco Education Fund to bring technology to school libraries as part of Project FIRST. Project FIRST (Fostering Instructional Reform through Service and Technology) shares LMC 2000's program goals—to improve student academic achievement and strengthen the bond between schools and their communities.

AmeriCorps is the result of the National Service Initiative signed into law by President Clinton in September of 1993. It provides the opportunity for community service initiatives across the country for up to two years in urban and rural areas. San Francisco was one of only six sites nationally participating in the AmeriCorps/IBM collaboration. IBM contributed 56 new computers (one for each librarian's own use and at least three in library), additional volunteers, training for AmeriCorps members and funds to purchase software.

Over the summer LMC 2000 librarians volunteered for four days of training in the use of electronic resources, developing library curriculum and preparing for the AmeriCorps members. Librarians praised the annual summer institute for providing time to plan for the year as well as to review and revise goals and priorities. They also appreciated the US $1000 grant from the Ed fund to librarians to underwrite the cost of

professional development (travel to conferences) and library materials (books, software). Ann Dalton, Lincoln High School sums it up this way: "The summer institute was a tremendous opportunity to share information, and ideas and to network. The extra LMC 2000 funding helped us to purchase additional books at Lincoln as well as the 'Foolproof' system for our library computers. The stipend for librarians to attend conferences is a major benefit enabling professional librarians to participate with other professionals to share and network ideas and to avail themselves of continuing educational opportunities provided at the conference."

An outstanding success in Year Two was the AmeriCorps work with librarians at sites to integrate technology into the school library. AmeriCorps members worked with librarians on building a technology base in the school library. Each of eight members worked with two schools during the year. Each AmeriCorps member assisted in the development and implementation of a library technology plan that became part of the annual report from each school library to the Ed Fund. AmeriCorps volunteers provided technical support (especially with donated IBM computers) and hands-on demonstrations, tutored student library users, and developed a week-long summer workshop series for teachers. For their part, AmeriCorps volunteers learned first hand the challenges and rewards of working in diverse inner city school libraries.

Year Three 1996-97

In the final year of the LMC 2000 Project, all SFUSD librarians were invited to attend and participate in all staff development activities— the summer institute and monthly meetings and the state library conference (with fee paid for one librarian per school to attend).

At the annual summer institute LMC 2000 librarians facilitated the program. As a group, they established a full year staff development calendar (including meeting dates, topics, school librarian host/facilitator and locations). LMC 2000 goals were reviewed and revised. Discussions included assessment of library media activities as well as on-going networking and collegial support.

San Francisco School Volunteers attended the summer institute and prioritized volunteer support for school libraries with special flyers and outreach efforts.. Some volunteers who work in San Francisco are given release time from their job sites to volunteer in the schools.

All year, school librarians have planned and facilitated the monthly professional meetings. "I think the first meeting we had this school year, with members of district curriculum teams participating was important in that it introduced a line of communication between district resource specialists and the LMC 2000 participants." said Adelaide Creet, Francisco Middle School.

Besides their own monthly meetings, this year school librarians had the opportunity to attend a monthly San Francisco Public Library "book review" committee meeting (with paid release day). San Francisco Public Library has been a staunch supporter of schools and school libraries. They have donated reference materials, provided literacy programs for classes and coordinated the annual summer reading program for all children in San Francisco.

The school librarians especially enjoyed the chance to attend San Francisco Public Library monthly book reviews and the state school library conference. Each monthly meeting agenda included reports on conferences and lists of review titles of merit and provided another means of enhancing communication among the librarians.

Last year most communication originated from the Ed Fund or the district office. Now most librarians have access to e-mail. Librarians now have one e-mail address for all district librarians. This year, meeting notices and updates as well as general networking is usually via e-mail! Many librarians subscribe to LM_NET and CALIBK12. LMC 2000 web site was created this year and linked to the district home page.

LMC 2000 and other libraries in the SFUSD participated—to their benefit—in two other programs in 1996/97.

School librarians in K-12 school libraries were supported by the Connections Project: a document delivery service sponsored by public, institution and university library members of the Greater Bay Area Library Council (including the San Francisco Public Library and the California Academy of Science Research Library). School librarians faxed student requests for articles from periodicals not available at the

school library. In return, Connections Project participants faxed up to five requested articles per week to the each school library.

California tax forms feature a School Library Protection Fund "tax check off" through the efforts of The California School Library Association. Each year the funds provide grants to school libraries throughout California. Additionally, data from grant applications is providing up-to-date information on the conditions in California's school libraries. "Best Sellers" is a campaign to increase awareness and support for the School Library Protection Fund and in the long term to strengthen California's school libraries and school library programs. The "Best Sellers" Campaign recruits a dedicated group of spokespeople or "Best Sellers" to advocate the need for strong school libraries as a way to increase/enhance student achievement. SFUSD Superintendent Rojas and San Francisco's Mayor Willie Brown are among California's "Best Sellers."

LOOKING AHEAD

During the last three years, the innovative Ed Fund program, Library Media Center 2000, has provided support for SFUSD school librarians. We have participated in monthly staff development, annual retreats and state-wide conferences, focusing on collaborative teaching, technology and curriculum. We have applied research-based information and activities to our school libraries. We have also shared successes and challenges through collegial networking.

The LMC 2000 Project addressed core needs: staffing, training, and materials with an essential focus on technology and curriculum. Over the three years of the project, school librarians identified the urgent need for continuous advocacy at the local, state and national levels. It is vital that we stress the key importance of libraries to literacy and life long-learning for all students.

In June 1997, the Ed Fund has earmarked funds for a fourth summer institute. LMC 2000 members will plan and coordinate the two-day program.

As a consortium team, LMC 2000 librarians have applied for a state library grant to support staff development as well as a local grant to promote a collaborative initiative for information literacy district wide. In preparing for these grants and the institute, LMC 2000 participants pinpointed three areas of need: (1) to continue and expand professional development opportunities for school librarians, (2) to continue and expand networking and communication, and (3) to develop support for libraries

All District school librarians will attend monthly professional meetings and the annual summer institute as well as one annual state conference on which they will report at a monthly meeting. San Francisco Public Library children's librarians will be invited to attend District school librarians' meetings. And, the school librarians will continue to attend San Francisco Public Library monthly book reviews and take part other activities with SFPL children's librarians. The LMC 2000 e-mail communication begun this year will expand with a newsletter for and about Library Media Center 2000. The newsletter will provide a vehicle to communicate regularly with teachers, set up group codes by subject, and link to good web sites. The LMC 2000 newsletter (in print and electronic formats) will also highlight noteworthy conference information.

During the 1997-98 school year, middle and high school librarians have committed to research, develop and publish standards for information literacy. They will develop a set of competencies for students to learn at each grade level, along with curriculum, applications, interdisciplinary themes including research strategy checklists and charts of research sources. The librarians will publish an information literacy newsletter on the LMC 2000 web site and make it available in print for all district school libraries.

CONCLUSION

The school library is a key, critical instrument for developing strong literacy programs, innovative curriculum, and the methods of teaching information skills. Research supports the premise that student outcomes will improve if school libraries are revitalized.

The San Francisco Ed Fund has highlighted the importance of school librarians with this major three

year initiative, the LMC 2000 Project. This very public, very positive validation has supported and unified San Francisco Unified School District school librarians. We are confident in using a variety of technologies for communication and research. We are knowledgeable advocates for quality school library programs that improve literacy, extend the curriculum, and teach information skills. We are actively working to continue and expand the revitalization of school libraries in San Francisco public schools.

And, thanks to LMC 2000, we are able to be full-time librarians!

NOTES

* The quotes from librarians were gathered at monthly meetings and via e-mail. LMC 2000 librarians also offered e-mail feedback and editing comments to this paper.

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